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# Mayor's focus: customer service

## Plans to drop ticket fee, expand 311 call system

By Kristen Green, Globe Correspondent | January 7, 2007

In his annual state of the city address on New Year's Day, Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone vowed to continue his work to make Somerville government accessible, transparent, and service-oriented by rolling out a new customer service initiative.

It was the third annual speech for Curtatone, who said he plans to run for reelection in the fall. The city charter stipulates that the address be held the first Monday of the year, and his staff made up half the City Hall audience even though it was a holiday. The state's new lieutenant governor, Timothy P. Murray, also attended, promising in a brief speech that the new Democratic administration would act as a partner to Somerville.

Curtatone, 40, told the crowd of more than 100 people that as part of his new customer service initiative, he would drop the city's \$3 fee for paying parking tickets online.

He said he also wants to expand the hours that the city's 311 customer service center answers calls and to incorporate more city departments in the program. He said the customer service line, the first contact point for residents calling any city department, should be available from every Somerville home phone and all cellular phone providers by dialing 311. During its first year of use, the 311 call center took 30,000 calls.

He also said he plans to hire an Internet services director early this year to improve the city's website and make it more convenient by adding new services, such as online applications for construction permits.

He said he will have ATM machines installed in city buildings to make paying for services more convenient. And he said he will establish a system for conducting exit surveys of residents after they use city services. He said he will also deploy "mystery shoppers" to learn how residents are actually treated by city departments.

He invoked Governor Deval Patrick's call for residents to reconnect with their government in vowing to establish community advisory groups in the city's neighborhoods. The groups, he said, will meet monthly with city staffers to make recommendations for improvements and consider problems in the neighborhoods.

Curtatone said he will confer with the Board of Aldermen to determine which neighborhoods would be good places to introduce pilot groups.

Curtatone also said the city will select a contractor next month to design and implement energy-saving programs in Somerville's schools and municipal buildings. He promised to start construction on several parks and to bring high-speed wireless Internet access to the entire city. He said the city will also hire a police chief in 2007, and Somerville Avenue will undergo a major reconstruction.

Curtatone said he is proud of how far the city has come under his leadership. But, he said, "we are just getting started."

Highlighting some of the city's achievements last year, he cited an accord reached between the Mystic View Task Force and Assembly Square developers that will allow development to proceed around the shopping center on the Mystic River.

Last year the state also committed to building an extension of the MBTA's Green Line service through Somerville by 2014. And he pointed to plans he released to redevelop Union Square as an artist-friendly urban center. ■

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